

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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River access

More public access points coming on Arkansas River

The Arkansas River, as it meanders through south-central Kansas, is a wonderful natural resource though not one that is overly appreciated. But that might change.

A coalition of conservation groups, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and 10 local governments along a 120-mile stretch of the river are working on plans to create more public access points. The Arkansas River Corridor Access Plan, in the works for about two years now, is to open access points every five miles from the Reno-Rice county line downstream to near Oxford on the Sumner-Cowley county line.

Included in the consortium are Reno County and the cities of Hutchinson and South Hutchinson.

In some places, cities or counties already own riverfront land where they could open access points. Others would need to be purchased or leased from private landowners.

Some access points will be primarily for watercraft with a boat ramp and small parking lot. Others would allow river enjoyment from the banks, with restrooms, playgrounds, picnic areas and camping spaces.

Kansas' rivers largely are underused for recreation or simple enjoyment, and that is a shame. Especially in a state that ranks near the bottom in the U.S. for the amount of public land. The Arkansas is one of three navigable streams in Kansas. The Kansas and Missouri rivers also do not have many public access points, but similar efforts are underway for them, too.

The Arkansas, for one, offers good fishing and floating and good places to picnic and bird-watch. Having camping sites would be a terrific addition.

Rivers should be enjoyed beyond just a passing glance while motor-ing past over a bridge. The Arkansas River access points through these parts are an exciting project that will make the river a real recreational asset.